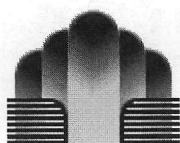




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Subject Chicago Buildings stalled as money woes leave Spire, other
towers short

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Our skyline on pause

**Tribune architecture critic Blair Kamin sees Chicago's soaring artistry stall
as money woes leave Spire, other towers short**

Tribune staff report

November 3, 2008

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A big chill is about to hit the city of big shoulders.

In the wake of the global credit crisis, Chicago's once-superheated skyline—radically transformed during the last 10 years by one of the greatest building booms in the city's history—is on the verge of being frozen in place.

With future projects on hold, the construction cranes that symbolize the city's vitality gradually

will disappear. There will be less outlandish architecture for the city's boosters to crow about. Chicago, which prides itself on skyscrapers that combine the soaring artistry of the architect and the cunning ambition of the developer, will lose some of its swagger.

How long the freeze will last is hard to predict. But it's clear that a chill has set in. And the trend reaches beyond the halt in construction on two supertall skyscrapers, including the twisting Chicago Spire that promised to soar 2,000 feet above the city's lakefront.

The credit crunch has staggered the city's condominium market. Although developers are expected to deliver a record-smashing 4,900 units this year, fewer than 500 units may be finished in 2010.

"We have ground to a halt," said Gail Lissner, vice president of Appraisal Research Counselors of Chicago.

For a decade now, Chicago has been on an astonishing building binge. Since 1998, developers here have completed or started construction on more than 195 high-rise buildings, according to the Emporis building database. (A high-rise is defined as a building at least 12 stories tall.) That's more high-rises than there are in all of Detroit (132), St. Louis (106) or Milwaukee (83).

The boom will reach a symbolic climax when a helicopter lifts sections of a bright-gray spire atop the Trump International Hotel & Tower Chicago, probably in mid-November. City officials postponed the installation, which had been planned for Saturday and Sunday, because of unresolved safety concerns. At a total height of 1,361 feet, the Trump skyscraper will be the tallest built in the United States since the 1974 completion of the 1,450-foot Sears Tower.

But now, a drought in major construction projects looms, not just in Chicago, but in New York and cities nationwide. And that may take some getting used to, especially for recent arrivals used to the sight of multiple construction cranes dotting the skyline and the sound of whirring cement-mixers. During the surge, Chicago's skyline morphed significantly.

New skyscrapers, mostly residential buildings, filled in the blanks between downtown high-rises or expanded the central area's reach to River North or the stretch of Lake Shore Drive across from Soldier Field. Towers popped up like beanstalks behind the cliff of skyscrapers along Michigan Avenue across from Millennium Park. And they wrapped like arms around the north and south sides of Grant Park.

To be sure, the city has weathered building busts before, most notably during the Great Depression and World War II. Some rental high-rises remain in the pipeline. And work stoppages on iconic skyscrapers are not unprecedented, though the delays were caused by faulty construction rather than financing woes. In 1966, construction halted for months on the X-braced, 100-story John Hancock Center to repair defective caissons.

Architecture fans also can take comfort in the fact that work on a handful of eye-popping towers is still steaming ahead. This week, in the 200 block of North Columbus Drive, construction

crews reached the 59th floor of the 82-story Aqua residential tower, whose curving white balconies lend the skyscraper a voluptuous profile. Aqua's first residents are expected to move in next April.

But Aqua's developers have put on hold a nearby, 76-story mixed-use tower designed by Miami architects Arquitectonica. A dramatic, 20-story hole was to be sliced into the tower's midsection, recalling the Arquitectonica-designed high-rises seen on "Miami Vice."

"The banks essentially are gun-shy about any large project," said the project's developer, Jim Loewenberg, the co-chief executive officer of the Magellan Development Group.

At the Spire site, 400 N. Lake Shore, the grandly conceived tower is nothing more than a hole in the ground surrounded by a ring of caissons. Construction cranes are gone. It is unclear when, if ever, they will return.

Developer Garrett Kelleher has spent at least \$50 million on construction, according to project spokeswoman Kim Metcalfe. She cites that investment as evidence that work on the project will resume and that it will open in 2012, even though the skyscraper's star architect, Santiago Calatrava, recently filed a lien seeking more than \$11.3 million in payment from Kelleher.

"When you've invested this much time, effort and tangible money in the project, it is not *not* going to happen," Metcalfe said.

Work also is frozen at 111 W. Wacker Drive, home to Chicago's other stalled supertall skyscraper, the Waterview Tower and Shangri-La Hotel. (To be considered "supertall," a skyscraper needs to be at least 1,000 feet high.)

The firm that developed and designed Waterview, Chicago-based Teng, planned for it to reach an impressive 1,047 feet, a foot taller than New York's celebrated Chrysler Building. Instead, the project is stuck on the 26th floor, its exposed concrete frame looming over Wacker.

Teng announced in April that the Beijing Construction Engineering Group Co. Ltd. and its American subsidiary would arrange for more than \$300 million in construction financing to finish the job. Yet construction remains on hold. Sean McMahon, a spokesman for Teng, did not return telephone calls.

There are other signs of a skyline on hold. Since July, there has been no construction on the 16-story Staybridge Suites hotel at 127 W. Huron St., where the developer is Duke Miglin, son of cosmetics entrepreneur Marilyn Miglin and the late developer Lee Miglin. Although the building's innovative structural frame is complete, the frame is not covered. And winter is coming, with its destructive snow and ice.

"You can't let building materials sit exposed that weren't intended to be exposed for a long time,"

said the building's architect, Joe Valerio of Chicago. Miglin did not respond when asked to discuss the project.

In Trump's camp, the fate of the competing supertalls is hardly reason to gloat. For two years, the developer has been stuck at 75 percent in his quest to sell off all the units in the 92-story tower. A developer typically makes profit by selling off the final 10 percent to 20 percent.

"He's only going to barely make it financially because of the market hitting this crisis point," said architect Adrian Smith, who designed the tower while at the Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and is now at his own firm. "Luckily, it's done. It's a matter of timing."

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